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Ex-CIA official denies military understated Viet foe's strength

NEW YORK (AP) — President Lyndon B. Johnson was not misled about the strength of enemy forces in Vietnam, as suggested in a CBS documentary, a former CIA deputy director testified yesterday.

Appearing angry at times, George Carver, the CIA's deputy director for Vietnamese affairs from 1966 to 1973, said he was contacted by CBS less than two weeks before it broadcast a 1982 report that accused American military officials of suppressing key intelligence during the war.

Mr. Carver was on the witness stand for a third day in a \$120 million libel suit filed against CBS by retired Gen. William C. Westmoreland, who commanded the American forces in Vietnam from 1964 to 1968.

Gen. Westmoreland claims the broadcast, "The Uncounted Enemy: A Vietnam Deception," libeled him by saying there was an effort by the general's command to downplay communist troop strength in order to make the war seem winnable.

On cross-examination by CBS attorney David Boies, Mr. Carver conceded that in early 1967, he expressed the view that Gen. Westmoreland's order-of-battle reports, listing enemy strength, should have been substantially higher, perhaps doubled.

But he said the dispute concerned lightly

armed political forces, not the battlefield troops confronting American soldiers.

Mr. Carver appeared irate as Gen. Westmoreland's lawyer, Dan M. Burt, read an excerpt from the broadcast narrated by CBS correspondent Mike Wallace.

"Gen. Westmoreland had now won the intelligence war," Mr. Burt read. "And so, instead of being told of an enemy army of more than half a million, the president, the Congress and the American public were told there were only 248,000 Viet Cong left; that the enemy was running out of men."

"That statement is a lie," Mr. Carver answered before U.S. District Judge Pierre N. Leval could stop him to sustain an objection by Mr. Boies.

Mr. Carver later said he objected to the use of the word "army" to describe the combined communist force that included political operatives.

Mr. Carver maintained that Gen. Westmoreland could not have suppressed reports of enemy troop strength because too many intelligence analysts in Saigon and Washington had access to the information.

He added that the notes taken by producer George Crile, who interviewed him in early 1982, did not accurately reflect what he said.